

beneath the stars came falling on our heads by orphan_account

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Summary:

Mike tries to figure out the beginning, the middle, and the end of his story with Eleven. (Soulmate AU)

beneath the stars came falling on our heads

He thinks it begins with the rain.

It's raining when Mike finds her there in the middle of the forest, soaked to the bone without a raincoat. A small, shivering girl with a weird haircut and number for a name. That's how he meets her. And that's how he starts seeing the colors.

Or maybe it begins even farther than that, the beginning with the bedtime stories his mom told him. The ones about the soulmates and the *colors* and the worlds that bridged between two people with the same soul. The stories about how half of his heart was stored in someone else's chest and how his sun was the star someone else's planet orbited around. Stories like those.

Or maybe it begins when he starts seeing colors. The bursts of them, like the fireworks he only gets to see on the Fourth of July, but this time, they're not white dots across the black sky, looking like stars that move. They're absolutely breathtaking.

It starts with a simple pink, then a blue, a yellow, a green, and red. Everything fills in after that. She looks like she's taking it in at the same time he is — she even looks a little scared. But of what? The colors? Why would she be? They're amazing to look at, now he understands why his mom always looked so happy talking about them—

Wait. Does she even know what they're called? Did no one tell her? Is that why her fists are clenched so hard that her knuckles are turning ghost white, and why her eyes are wide with fear swimming in them? Is that why she looks so terrified of it all? Afraid of finally finding him?

Heck, does she even know they're *soulmates*?

It might begin with that, too. When he tells her. After Lucas and Dustin are gone, after they're all that's left in the basement. It's quiet.

(He'll never tell Lucas and Dustin about his new discovery, though.

Well, not yet.)

He learns her name is Eleven, but he calls her El, which earns a smile from her. The world grows a little brighter after that. It takes even more time getting used to it.

He says quietly, "We're soulmates, El."

She looks at him curiously. "Soul...mates?"

Mike bites his lip. He was right; she didn't know. "You know, when two people, uh, when someone meets their partner — their soulmate, the person they're destined to be with, I guess that's you and me — they start seeing colors, so it's not all monochrome."

"...monochrome?" she asks, still looking confused. He doesn't blame her.

"Black and white," he explains. Mike looks around, his eyes landing on a bag not too far from them. He points at it. "You see that bag? It's black. And that," he points at the ceiling, "is white."

She nods. "Only before soulmate?"

"Yeah," he says. "But now, you and I can see colors. My mom told me about it before. I can't remember their names, but I think she has a book for it somewhere. Hold on."

Mike looks through one of the boxes full of old books in the corner. There's books about cooking, mystery, adventure, those sorts of stuff. He finds the Color Spectrum Guide at the bottom, dusty and faded. It'll still work, though.

"Here," he says, opening the first page. It reads *BLUE*, in big letters at the top with a bunch of examples throughout the page. Okay. This isn't too hard. "That's blue, it's a color. Like that toy car over there. Blue."

"Blue," Eleven repeats. "*Blue*."

Mike nods. "Blue." He flips the page. "And this is yellow. Hey, wow, I never knew the sun was yellow!"

Eleven smiles, but still looks confused. "Sun?"

"I'll show you tomorrow morning, if you want. It's the thing that lights up the earth," he says. "Okay, so yellow. Okay."

"Yel-low," she says. "Yellow."

"These are really weird," he says. "We can learn them every night, so we don't stay up too late. It'll be fun."

"Okay," she says softly. "Fun."

"Hey, we're soulmates now. I'll help you no matter what."

"Mike, you're my colors," she says. El smiles, and maybe it begins there instead.

"You're my colors, too, El."

The middle is when he watches her on the chair, grinning as she leans back and her feet move upwards. It's nice to see her smile. It makes him happy.

But it doesn't end there. Not yet.

Events strings together like Christmas lights, they're new memories spent together. There are the nights they stay past twelve, reading about colors and making new names for those they couldn't find in the book. (There's a lot of them, which is a little odd.)

Eleven gets all the names down faster than he does, surprisingly and also unsurprisingly. She points them out to him, too, as they walk through the woods as she leads them to where Will is.

(He sees the small smile she gives him and returns it with his own. It brightens the world around him.)

But it turns out she's wrong because Will isn't there. He's not in his house. Of course he isn't. Maybe she was too amazed by the colors and got distracted. Maybe that's it. El wouldn't lead them astray... would she? She wouldn't do it on purpose. He's her friend. They're *soulmates*.

But then Mike sees Will's body getting dragged out for the entire fucking world to see — and it only proves what he *didn't* want to see: Eleven lied. Eleven was wrong.

"I thought we were friends, you know? But friends tell each other the truth. And they definitely don't lie to each other. You made me think Will was okay, that he was still out there, but he wasn't. He wasn't! Maybe you thought you were helping, but you weren't. You hurt me. Do you understand?"

El — *Eleven, her name is Eleven, not El, you idiot — doesn't say anything after that.*

(The colors dim a little, he notices. But it's not his fault. It's hers. She lied. He has every right to be angry.)

Eleven's toying with the static, changing it every second. But then he hears it. They both do. Will's voice cracks and is soft, but the connection is there. *He's* there. And that's all he needs at the moment.

(Mike says he's sorry through another session of describing colors, but he still feels bad. Even when the colors come back, they're not as bright as before. He doesn't know how to fix it; he must've hurt her, must've hurt her feelings and dammit, she's his soulmate! He's not supposed to hurt her and she's not supposed to hurt him. That's not how it's supposed to work. Okay, so maybe he doesn't really know how this soulmate thing is supposed to work out, but his gut tells him that they shouldn't fight. They can get through it. They *have* to.)

He calls everyone over immediately, tripping over his words as he explains that Will is alive. Will is out there. Will is okay.

(Well, maybe *okay* is stretching it. Just a little.)

The next day, he gives Eleven Nancy's old dress and wig, and Mike doesn't know what to expect, but the door opens—

Dustin's the first to speak up. "She looks—"

"Pretty," he finishes (because she definitely does, oh, wow, she really, *really* does), blushing. With a start, he realizes what he just said and can hear Dustin snickering behind him, so he adds, "Good. You look pretty good."

And oh fuck, she definitely looks better than *pretty good*.

(It's not like he notices or anything but the colors totally get brighter after that. Of course not.)

Eleven defends him from the mouth breathers — and totally looks badass doing it — and suddenly, Mike doesn't know what to say about his soulmate. She's *too good* for him; she's way out of his league. After that, they hear Will from the supercom, which is amazing and Will is okay, thank God, but Eleven isn't. Her nose bleeds and he holds her until she can walk properly again. Until the lights brighten again.

(The colors darken when she's hurt or weak, he realizes. It's like they're connected to the other's life force or something. At least now he'll know if she's hurt. But what if...what if the other dies? Do the colors disappear?)

When they get home, they discuss the Upside Down, figuring out a way to get there — which is through Eleven. His heart falters a little.

(What if she gets hurt? What if he can't protect her?)

Mr. Clarke tells them about the flea and the acrobat and how a massive amount of energy is needed. That...might be a problem. But Dustin finds a way with the compasses, insults them a little, but finds a way, nonetheless. They leave the next day.

Eleven tells him that they should turn back because she's tired, but Mike thinks it's more than that. The colors get dimmer for an odd

reason, but maybe it's just what El said: she's tired. Maybe the colors change when the other is tired, too.

But the four of them end up back to the beginning, and Lucas accuses Eleven of sabotage and he turns out to be right when he shows the blood on her wrist. And it suddenly makes sense — why she was tired and why the colors dimmed. But why did she stop them from getting there?)

(Lucas and Dustin will never understand why he defends her so much. Soulmates help one another and they *believe* in each other. And if El says that there are bad men out there, that they shouldn't go out into the Upside Down, maybe...maybe they shouldn't. But Will... he couldn't give up on Will. He can't. El's trying to protect them, he knows that, *of course* he does. But she has to trust them, too. Soulmates work like that. He'll defend her if she trusts him. He knows she does.)

But she leaves somewhere along the line, just like Lucas does. Mike doesn't know where she is, which makes it even worse. The colors stay the same, not a single change, so that leads him nowhere.

"ELEVEN!"

(He calls out her name until his breath is short, until his throat is sore, until his legs give way from walking. The sun has died when he walks back home, slumped shoulders and tired feet. He can't give up on finding her; not yet. Not now. Not ever.)

The colors stay the same.

Eventually, they find Eleven — well, *Eleven* finds *them*. He hugs her, of course, once those stupid mouth breathers are gone.

(There are several things he wants to say. Some of those are: *I'm sorry, it's not your fault, you're not the monster, I missed you, I was so worried, are you okay?*, and *I broke my promise*. He keeps his mouth shut instead, keeping his arms around her as long as he can.)

They bring her back to the house, back to the basement (which luckily for him, his mom never checks), where she'll be safe. For now.

Eleven takes off the wig in front of the mirror. She stares at herself, as if wondering about her appearance.

"You don't need it," he says.

"Still pretty?" she asks.

He nods. "Yeah! Pretty. Really pretty."

Eleven looks at herself in the mirror, with a small look of content.

"El?" he asks.

"Yes?"

He stammers, "Um, I'm happy you're home."

She smiles. "Me, too."

It's like that for a brief moment, just the two of them. His sun and her orbiting planet, but maybe he's wrong. Maybe she's the sun and he's the planet that orbits around her. She's the star that guides him home when he's lost and he's the planet that she relies on to always be there. Maybe that's what soulmates are like. Yeah. Maybe.

He doesn't realize that they've both been leaning forward until Dustin slams the door open, snapping them back onto the earth. They're not the sun and the planet anymore. Just Mike and Eleven.

Mike is blushing furiously and he can feel the heat on his cheeks, but he just hopes she doesn't notice. They leave the room and follow Dustin, eyes averted.

It all happens quickly after that — they hide in abandoned bus, Chief Hopper finds them and brings them to the Byers house, he talks to his sister and hugs her, they explain everything, and then they form a plan that might actually work.

Once she steps into the make-shift pool, the only thing that he can do now is hope that she'll be okay and that she'll find Will. She can do it.

(The colors dim while she floats there because she's using her powers

and it's draining her. He'll know when to call a time-out, when it gets too much and she's...well, when she's dying. He'll stop it. He can't lose her.)

Most of it works out as planned, he thinks, as El's head rests on his shoulder. Mike doesn't feel like asking her what happened; he doesn't want to trouble her. She's still shivering.

(The colors are a little dim, although she might be recovering still. It will be okay.)

And suddenly Nancy and Jonathan and Joyce and Chief Hopper are all gone, and Mike can't take waiting anymore. He leaves, only to see that they're the only ones left.

Dustin and Lucas go to look for the chocolate pudding, leaving Mike and Eleven alone, stuck between cafeteria tables and chairs. He smiles at her.

"Are you feeling any better?" he asks.

She only gives a confused look in return. "What's 'putting'?"

"Pudding, it's...it's this chocolate goo you eat with a spoon," he explains. "Don't worry, when all this is over, you won't have to keep eating junk food and leftovers like a dog anymore. My mom, she's a pretty awesome cook. She can make you whatever you like."

"Eggos?"

(Of course she asked that. It only made him smile.)

"Well, yeah, Eggos, but real food, too," he tells her. "See, I was thinking, once all this is over and Will's back and you're not a secret anymore, my parents can get you an actual bed for the basement. Or you can take my room if you want, since I'm down there all the time anyways. My point is, they'll take care of you. They'll be like your new parents, and Nancy, she'll be like your new sister."

She stares at him. "Will you be like my brother?"

"What? No, no." His face flushes.

"Why 'no'?" she asks, looking a little hurt.

"Because..." he says, "'cause it's different."

"Why?"

Mike sighs. "I mean, I don't know, I guess it's not. It's stupid."

"Mike," she says.

(Okay, so maybe the way she says his name makes his heart jump a little. Whatever, right?)

"Yeah?"

"Friends don't lie."

Dammit. "Well...I was thinking..." he says, "I don't know...maybe we can go to the Snow Ball together."

"Snow Ball?"

"It's this cheesy school dance, where you go in the gym and dance to music and stuff. I've never been, but I know you're not supposed to go with your sister." He doesn't look at her while he speaks — she'd only think he was an idiot.

"No?"

"I mean...you can, but it'd be really weird. You go to school dances with someone that, you know..." he pauses — oh, someone please help him, he can't do this — and takes a deep breath, "someone that you like."

"A friend?" she asks.

"Uh," he says, "um, someone like a..."

Here we go. Then he kisses her, but it's more of a spur of the moment kind of thing because Mike isn't really sure what he's doing and maybe Eleven thinks he's really weird right now, and the only thing he can hope for now is that she still talks to him after that.

"Soulmate," she whispers when he pulls away, a small smile playing on her lips. "Someone like a soulmate."

"Yeah," he says. "Someone like a soulmate."

"You're my colors," she says.

"And you're mine."

"Goodbye, Mike."

Please don't leave, El.

Mike knows the tricky thing about endings. There are multiple ways to try to change it, to reverse the effects; but there is always one outcome. And it's unchangeable.

Maybe he could've prevented it. Maybe he could've held onto her a little longer and told her why he needs her to stay. Maybe he should've stopped the Demogorgon himself. Maybe he should've done something. *Anything*.

"I'm sorry," he says when he's alone in the basement, staring at El's make-shift fort. "I'm *sorry*."

Even though they got Will back and the Demogorgon is gone, El isn't here with him to celebrate. She's not here. She's *gone*.

But she's not dead. No, he refuses to accept that she's dead because she's so much stronger than that. He can still see colors, no matter how faint, they still count. They're still there, dancing around and telling him that she's okay. Eleven is still okay. She's *alive*. And he'll know she is as long as he can still see the colors. She's okay. She's just out there, somewhere in the woods, waiting.

(Waiting for someone to come and find her, waiting for him to find her, waiting for more Eggos, waiting to come back home — *waiting*.)

Mike has figured the whole soulmate thing out already. It's when two people meet and they understand each other more than anyone else does. They're not orbiting plants or burning suns. Soulmates are *stars* — stars that are meant for each other, destined to stay next to each other as long as they live. That's what they were. That's what they *are*.

He'll love her even when she's not standing next to him, even when she isn't there to offer a smile. He'll love her.

Because Eleven is always going to be his beginning, his middle, and his end.